

The Patient Experience Post

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Since the mid-1990s, Baird has helped healthcare organizations nationwide improve the patient experience and enhance organizational culture. Baird's culture assessment and diagnosis include experience mapping, medical mystery shopping, and focus groups to reveal the real customer experiences within your organization. Using your patients' experiences, Baird and her team prescribe critical next steps for improving patient satisfaction and HCAHPS scores.

Data, Data Everywhere and Not a Drop of Information: 4 ways to drill down patient satisfaction numbers

by Kristin Baird, RN, BSN, MHA

You'd be hard-pressed today to find a healthcare organization—especially a hospital—that didn't conduct some form of patient or resident satisfaction survey. Whether it's a survey supported by a national vendor or one of the homegrown variety, those surveys lead to a flood of data coming back to our nation's healthcare providers. Those organizations can tell you why it's important to collect patient satisfaction data. They know that it's five times more costly to attract a new customer than to retain a current one, and that a large majority of dissatisfied customers won't voice their dissatisfaction but simply vote with their feet and take their business elsewhere.

While benchmarking data may show how you compare to your peers, it may leave a void in understanding what to do in order to improve your scores. Many organizations find themselves overwhelmed with the flood of patient satisfaction data that is coming back to them. A hospital can report that its OB unit boasts an overall 95 percent satisfaction rate, yet "concern about noise" still ranks at 67 percent in satisfaction. But what do those numbers mean to the staff who want to create a better experience for the next expectant mother coming through the doors?

It seems that, even though the majority of healthcare organizations have come to conduct patient satisfaction surveys, many of them are unsure of what to do with the wealth of information that those surveys bring. By simply reporting results and periodic improvements in scores, providers are only exposing the tip of the customer satisfaction iceberg. It tells you where the problems lie yet doesn't tell you what to do about them.

The raw numbers are a great beginning, but there are additional, qualitative methods that can be used to help organizations more fully understand the impact of those numbers on their patients. Because patients themselves are human beings, not numbers, sometimes you need to go to the source to get the real story behind the data.

Talk—and listen—to your patients

This means going beyond interactions that are necessary to provide for the patient's care. It also means that someone in addition to the patient's direct caregivers is doing the listening. In your organization, do members of administration or senior management regularly make patient care rounds? Does the department manager make daily rounds to patients?

Rounding is an ideal time to engage patients in conversations about their care. Ask for specific information about any problem areas indicated by the numbers on your satisfaction surveys. Find out what is most important to the patient or resident. Use rounds as an opportunity to find out not only how your team is

doing but also what great care means to that patient or resident. Use their feedback to further investigate what the data indicates.

For example, your data shows that noise has been a problem. When you make rounds, you ask patients or residents how the noise level has been and gather specifics when possible. “Is there a specific time when you noticed that the unit was particularly noisy? Was the noise mostly talking, overhead pages, or clanging equipment?” Their feedback can be invaluable.

Take family members into account

The patient may be the one in the bed, but that person rarely comes alone. Family members or friends are often able to provide additional unique perspectives. They are there to support a patient and want only the very best care for their family member. However, they aren’t immediately affected by pain or medical procedures, so they have the time and the attention to devote to observing the surroundings.

Even if a patient is unavailable to talk during rounding, if a family member is readily available, it is equally important to listen to their point of view. Ask them what has made the hospital experience easier for their family member or what might be improved.

From opinions on wait times to nurse demeanor and noise, a family member’s observations can influence a patient’s satisfaction and how your facility is perceived.

Focus groups tell a story

Periodic focus groups comprised of past patients help fill out the details about satisfaction levels. Your patients are continually adjusting their expectations; therefore, healthcare providers must continually adjust their practices to meet those shifting expectations.

A successful focus group moderator will be able to draw out details from your patients about what differentiates between a merely “satisfying” experience and an “exceptional” one.

You make the call

Does your organization make discharge phone calls? These calls might be one more thing to work into someone’s “to-do” list, but the information gathered can be invaluable. A phone call the day after discharge can help drill down for specifics on any number of patient concerns, from unclear discharge instructions to the fact that the wheels on the cleaning cart squeaked loudly in the middle of the night.

The common denominator between all these methods used to gather further information is direct communication with the customer—whether it’s the patient or a member of his family. The person doing the communicating must be a skilled listener with the ability to ask the right question at the right time and apply the response to improving patient satisfaction. And anecdotal information is a great resource for understanding what the survey indicates.

Knowing how to interpret and use the satisfaction data can be a challenge. Augment your data with first-hand patient information whenever possible. Not only will these interactions help you clarify patient expectations, they will provide pertinent stories about their experiences, and you will be well on your way to making meaningful changes.

Learn more about ways you can ensure that all of your customer interactions, including over-the-phone interactions, support your healthcare organization's brand, as in [Living Your Brand Promise](#), featuring Kent Seltman, co-author of Management Lessons From Mayo Clinic. As the former Director of Marketing at Mayo Clinic, Seltman was charged with managing the brand for this world-renowned organization. During this 90-minute presentation, you'll hear about crucial elements in aligning the brand promise with the patient experience in order to build trust and credibility with customers. For only \$89, you'll receive all this: pre-session worksheets, a session workbook, webinar slides, and an audio CD of the 90-minute webinar, complete with the Q&A session.

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*Nurse, author, and consultant Kristin Baird, "Healthcare's Customer Service Guru," is the author of *Raising the Bar on Service Excellence: The Health Care Leader's Guide to Putting Passion into Practice* (Golden Lamp Press, 2008), *Reclaiming the Passion: Stories that Celebrate the Essence of Nursing* (Golden Lamp Press, 2004), and *Customer Service In Healthcare: A Grassroots Approach to Creating a Culture of Service Excellence* (Jossey Bass, 2000).*